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Soviet Bloc Truckers Suspected of Spying

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BRUSSELS—East European truck drivers are being closely watched on trips to West European nations for suspected spying, Western security officials say.

Trucks from the Soviet Union and other Warsaw pact nations have been observed systematically gathering information, particularly sur-

veys of the road network that would be used in any invasion of Western Europe, officials involved in the investigation said.

Soviet drivers have been seen probing the depth of rivers and there have been reports that some of the drivers are actually Soviet army tank officers becoming famili-

ar with roads.

Suspicious arose when Dutch officials discovered that some Soviet trucks were taking up to four days to travel the few hundred miles between the West German border and the port of Rotterdam. Also, listed cargo was frequently something uneconomical for long-distance truck transport, such as peat.

The number of Soviet Bloc trucks in Western Europe has increased since the 1970s, when East European countries joined the Geneva-based International Road Transport Union. Members are entitled to send trucks bearing special license plates on international routes with sealed cargo checked by customs only at the destination.

Western security officers said Soviet trucking seems highly controlled, with Soviet Embassy or consulate officials often meeting truckers along the route for prearranged rendezvous. At Terneuzen, in the Netherlands, Soviet truckers staying at the Hotel de Post regularly receive telephone calls from Soviet diplomats, even during the night.

Security officers in Brussels and other NATO capitals say the Soviet drivers are believed to be on several missions:

- Systematic reconnaissance of roads.

- Observation in areas off-limits to military attaches, such as major Western strategic installations that would be infiltrated before an attack.

- Delivery of material and people to and from underground Soviet agents.

- Outright spying during North Atlantic Treaty Organization exercises and troop movements.

- Interception of official telecommunications with electronic devices.